



# CHINA CHANGES FACE

*The Road From Revolution  
1949-1989*

JOHN GITTINGS

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## CHRONOLOGICAL GUIDE, 1949–89

*1949: Liberation.* China is at last at peace after the CIVIL WAR between Communists and Nationalists (1946–9), which followed close after the ANTI-JAPANESE WAR (1937–45), and concludes with CHIANG KAI-SHEK's flight to Taiwan. Mao proclaims the PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA on Tiananmen Square, 1 October 1949. 'The Chinese people have stood up. . . . We have friends all over the world!'

*February 1950: Sino-Soviet Alliance.* The US has rejected diplomatic relations and trade with China unless it refrains from alliance with the Soviet Union. Mao refuses to be neutral—there is 'no middle road'. Two months of tough negotiations with Stalin produce the SINO-SOVIET TREATY OF ALLIANCE AND MUTUAL ASSISTANCE.

*1950–2: Land Reform.* Land and tools are taken from the landlords and rich peasants and redistributed, completing the process begun during the civil war in the communist areas. Several hundred thousand are executed after STRUGGLE MEETINGS, others are left with a share of land. The 1950 MARRIAGE LAW condemns the 'feudal system'. Peasants are encouraged to join MUTUAL-AID TEAMS, sharing manpower and tools in the busy season.

*Economic rehabilitation.* Unemployment, prostitution, and inflation are tamed in the towns, banditry suppressed in the north-west and south-west, railways and irrigation works restored and extended, communist 'cadres' replace corrupt local officials, a nation-wide food distribution system and public health network begin to be built, all in spite of . . .

*June 1950–July 1953: Korean War.* China is obliged to intervene in Korea just as it embarks on 'peaceful reconstruction' at home, when US forces, retaliating against the North, approach the China–Korea border. (Mao is supposed to have paced the floor for three days and nights before deciding.) The US imposes an economic blockade, and 'interdicts' the TAIWAN STRAITS to prevent the People's Republic from recovering Taiwan. China is



excluded from the UNITED NATIONS and forced into greater dependence upon Moscow.

*1953–6: Building a ‘normal’ society.* The mood becomes more stolidly socialist in the Soviet style. FIRST FIVE-YEAR PLAN (1953–7) emphasizes heavy industry, with a ‘command economy’ and low investment in agriculture. First NATIONAL PEOPLE’S CONGRESS (1954) adopts state constitution; EIGHTH COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS (1956) pronounces end of ‘class struggle’ and hardly mentions Mao’s name. The PEOPLE’S LIBERATION ARMY becomes a conscript army with ranks, medals, and sliding pay scale. After STALIN’S DEATH (February 1953), more equal relationship with Soviet Union. In talks with the US after the BANDUNG NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE (April 1955), China’s offer of trade, cultural exchanges, foreign ministers’ conference, etc. is rejected.

*1955–7: Mao explores a new road.* Mao, against the trend of ‘normalization’, encourages rural activists to speed up establishment of AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES (1955) in which land becomes collective and income is distributed according to labour. Mao denies the need to wait for MECHANIZATION. The Chinese peasants are like a ‘sheet of white paper’ on which one can write beautiful words of socialism. In the HUNDRED FLOWERS MOVEMENT (1956–7) Mao first invites intellectuals to speak out against Party bureaucracy, but then endorses Party crack-down, worried by the example of protests in Hungary and Poland. Thousands sent to countryside in ANTI-RIGHTIST CAMPAIGN (1957). Mao begins to criticize post-Stalin Soviet leadership for ‘leaving the socialist path’.

*1958–61: Great Leap Forward—and back.* The goal is to speed up the TRANSITION TO COMMUNISM, and overcome the THREE GREAT DIFFERENCES (between mental and manual labour, city and countryside, worker and peasant). Agricultural Co-operatives merged into PEOPLE’S COMMUNES with unsuccessful experiments in communal eating, rural steel-smelting, etc. Simultaneous ‘Leap ahead’ is called for in industry. Normal production is disrupted by unrealistic policies and bad weather. There is local famine and widespread hardship leading to millions of premature deaths. China opposes Soviet *détente* policy towards US; Moscow withdraws aid and SINO-SOVIET

DISPUTE becomes open. China develops economic policy of SELF-RELIANCE, becomes a nuclear power without outside help. People's communes are subdivided into brigades and teams, most functions assigned to the lowest team (village) level.

1959–65: *The first 'inner-Party' struggle.* At LUSHAN PLENUM (July 1959), Minister of Defence PENG DEHUI criticizes the Great Leap, is denounced by Mao as 'anti-Party', and is replaced by LIN BIAO. In 1962 Head of State LIU SHAOQI speaks in favour of PENG's rehabilitation. A play by Beijing's deputy mayor WU HAN, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, makes a veiled attack on Mao's dismissal of Peng. At TENTH PLENUM Mao responds with warning, 'Never forget class struggle', claiming that China like the Soviet Union faces danger of 'revisionism'. JIANG QING (Madame Mao) encourages radical Shanghai scholars ZHANG CHUNQIAO and YAO WENYUAN to launch a counter-attack on WU HAN's play. Mao's LITTLE RED BOOK is prepared and circulated in armed forces by LIN BIAO. SOCIALIST EDUCATION MOVEMENT (1964–5) targets alleged revival of capitalism in countryside.

1966–8: *The first Cultural Revolution.* Radical attack on WU HAN (see above) leads to overthrow of Beijing Communist Party leadership in May 1966. LIU SHAOQI and other leaders try to contain growth of RED GUARD movement in Beijing colleges, but Mao urges them to rebel against those Party leaders 'taking the capitalist road'. ELEVENTH PLENUM (August 1966) endorses 16-POINT DECISION on Cultural Revolution, demotes LIU SHAOQI. Millions of Red Guards attend Beijing rallies, denounce officials as bureaucrats, ransack 'bourgeois' homes, travel around China to 'exchange experiences'. CHEN BODA leads Party's CULTURAL REVOLUTION GROUP with JIANG QING as deputy. LIN BIAO proclaimed as Mao's 'chosen successor'. Early in 1967 pro-Mao rebel groups encouraged to 'seize power' from Party bureaucrats, but are split by factional quarrels. In the WUHAN INCIDENT the ultra-left attacks Premier ZHOU ENLAI and armed forces. Reaction against indiscipline and violence leads to disbandment of Red Guards under army supervision.

1968–76: *The second Cultural Revolution.* By September 1968, REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEES set up for all provinces, and at lower levels of government, also in schools, factories, etc. By

1976 twelve million students have gone DOWN TO THE COUNTRY-SIDE. Colleges reopen with policy of OPEN-DOOR SCHOOLING and 'political criteria' for admission. In industry, cadres and workers partially exchange functions in the TWO PARTICIPATIONS; campaigns are launched against material incentives. People's communes improve land in campaigns for CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION: some 'RAISE LEVEL OF OWNERSHIP' from team to brigade: BAREFOOT DOCTORS and MEDICAL CO-OPERATIVE SCHEMES spread.

*February 1972: The Nixon Visit.* US President Richard Nixon visits Beijing acknowledging Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China. China enters the UN and is soon recognized by two-thirds of its members. With new opportunities, Chinese trade doubles from 1965 to 1973. Large-scale imports of western technology begin.

*1971-6: The second 'inner-Party' struggle.* September 1971, death of LIN BIAO in plane over Outer Mongolian airspace; ZHOU ENLAI restores state administration; 1973 return of DENG XIAOPING to become Zhou's deputy, rise of WANG HONGWEN at NINTH PARTY CONGRESS; ultra-left launch CRITICIZE CONFUCIUS AND LIN BIAO CAMPAIGN (directed against Zhou). January 1975, NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS, Zhou announces FOUR MODERNIZATIONS; anti-revisionist polemics by ZHANG CHUN-QIAO and YAO WENYUAN. Summer 1975, DENG XIAOPING calls for industrial and educational reform. January 1976, death of ZHOU ENLAI. 5 April, TIANANMEN DEMONSTRATION leads to Deng's dismissal, HUA GUOFENG appointed Acting Premier. 9 September, death of MAO. 6 October, Gang of Four arrested.

*1977-84: Rejection of Cultural Revolution.* 1977, HUA GUOFENG elaborates FOUR MODERNIZATIONS policy to take China to THE YEAR 2000. December 1978, THIRD PLENUM 'readjusts' policy, calls for SEEKING TRUTH FROM FACTS. 1979, DEMOCRACY WALL and UNOFFICIAL MAGAZINES briefly encouraged; higher living standards emphasized, peasants paid more for produce, free markets opened in towns. 1980-3, RURAL RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM allowing land to be managed by individual households spreads to 90 per cent of rural population. July 1981, RESOLUTION ON QUESTIONS OF PARTY HISTORY condemns Cultural Revolution and Mao's 'mistakes'; HUA GUOFENG replaced by

HU YAOBANG. October 1984, DECISION ON REFORM OF ECONOMIC STRUCTURE extends reform to urban sector.

1983–8: *Rethinking versus reaction*. October 1983, campaign against SPIRITUAL POLLUTION. December 1984, HU YAOBANG encourages RETHINKING OF MARXISM. September 1985, CHEN YUN warns against excessive reform. Spring–summer 1986, reform-minded scholars argue for REFORM OF POLITICAL STRUCTURE. December 1986, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. January 1987, resignation of HU YAOBANG; conservative/leftist revival led by DENG LIQUN. October 1987, ZHAO ZIYANG confirmed as Secretary-General at THIRTEENTH PARTY CONGRESS, calls for DEEPENING THE REFORM and OPENING THE DOOR WIDER. March 1988, LI PENG becomes Premier at SEVENTH NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS.

1979– : *Open Door policy*. 1979, China signs trade agreement with US, first law allowing Chinese–foreign JOINT VENTURES. 1980, China gains EEC most-favoured nation status, foreign oil companies begin offshore prospecting, China rejoins IMF and World Bank. Early to mid-1980s, SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES, OPEN CITIES, and COASTAL PROVINCES gain increasing autonomy to attract foreign investment and manufacture. 1987, Hainan declared a new province with special status; Zhao Ziyang calls entire seaboard China's 'gold coast' and key to future; Chinese arms sales expand to Gulf and Middle East.

1988– : *New turning-point?* PRICE REFORM postponed at September 1988 Central Committee as INFLATION tops 20 per cent. Another campaign launched against Party CORRUPTION. Agriculture fails to meet GRAIN OUTPUT target of 400 million tons. Demonstrations in TIBET (October 1987; March 1988) are suppressed by force with civilian casualties. But SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS look forward to possible summit meeting, and tension over KAMPUCHEA eases. China prepares to celebrate 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC (1 October 1989).

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *After the Revolution*

### THE TWO ROADS

*If the Japanese scientist, in order to help mankind vanquish syphilis, had the patience to test six hundred and five preparations before he developed a six hundred and sixth which met definite requirements, then those who want to solve a more difficult problem, namely, to vanquish capitalism, must have the perseverance to try hundreds and thousands of new methods, means, and weapons of struggle in order to elaborate the most suitable of them.* (Lenin, June 1919)

*After a period following the Transition to Ownership by the Whole People, the Productive Forces of Society will be expanded even more greatly; the Products of Society will become extremely Abundant; Communist Ideology, Consciousness, and Moral Character of the entire people will be raised immensely, and Education will be Universal and raised to a Higher Level.* (Red Flag, 1 Sept. 1958)

*For a period in the past, the tune for Communism was deafening. This tune may have been loud, but it was unfortunately divorced from reality. It made the masses suffer and really discouraged them.* (People's Daily, 18 Nov. 1987)

*Actually up till now we have had no theory, correct or incorrect, that could tell us what our future will be like. We used to say 'socialism'. Now we say 'Chinese-style socialism'. What is 'Chinese-style socialism'? Just a name.* (Fang Lizhi, dissident scholar, 1985)

China has changed. Forty years after the revolution it has become apparent quite suddenly that China is now a completely



different place from the People's Republic of Chairman Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung). As their country continues to be transformed around them, the Chinese are still trying to adjust—particularly those who remember the nearly three decades (1949–76) of Self-reliance and Hard Struggle while Mao was alive. Outside China, it is almost as hard to keep up with and evaluate the new face presented by a country which in the 1970s appeared to offer the Third World a distinctive model of 'revolutionary socialist' development. Mao's successors now say that his road was the wrong one for China, let alone for other countries, and that they are not at all sure what socialism means, let alone communism. In just one decade most of China's cities and coastal regions have already joined the modern world of advanced technology and global communications, and are providing goods and labour for the international market. Political change is slower—the combined legacy of Confucius and Mao remains considerable. But the argument for democracy within the Communist Party and even for a multi-party system can be heard frequently and the Party 'conservatives' are steadily losing ground. As reform gathers momentum elsewhere in the 'socialist world', and particularly in the Soviet rethinking led by Gorbachev, the Chinese experiment learns from other countries' experiences, and is studied by them in turn.

One of the most remarkable changes of the 1980s in China was announced quietly a year before the fortieth anniversary by the State Statistical Bureau. China was no longer a nation of peasants. As late as 1980 four out of every five Chinese had still lived in the countryside—800 million out of the total population of a billion by that date. The Bureau revealed that in the years 1980 to 1986 the proportion of urban population in China had increased from 20.6 per cent to 37.1 per cent of the total. In numbers, this meant an increase from about 210 million to nearly 400 million. This development, said the Bureau with careful balance, was both 'gratifying and worrying'. It was gratifying because the urbanization of China meant that it was becoming a more developed country. It was worrying because another 180 million people had become food consumers rather than food producers, creating new pressures on the supply of grain, meat, and vegetables as well as upon the physical and social fabric of China's cities and towns.